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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL SOCI SU
SUBJECT: UMMA PARTY OFFICIAL DENIES AGREEMENT WITH NCP

REF: KHARTOUM 332

Dialogue, But No Agreement, With NCP

¶1. (SBU) On March 6 Emboffs met with Dr. Mariam Al Sadig Al Mahdi,
Secretary for Foreign Relations, National Umma Party (and daughter

SIPDIS
of Umma leader and former Prime Minister Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi).
Emboff's asked Dr. Al Mahdi about press reports suggesting that Umma
and the National Congress Party (NCP) have entered into a wide
ranging "agreement." Al Mahdi denied that there is any formal
agreement between her party and the NCP. Rather, she said, the two
sides have agreed to open a dialogue and establish a framework
within which to proceed. On March 5, the two parties agreed to meet
on a monthly basis. Al Mahdi indicated that Umma has been engaged
in similar discussions with other parties for some time.

An End to the "NCP State?"

¶2. (SBU) Mahdi said that Umma has induced the NCP to agree to the
hiring of members of other political parties for positions in the
government (at the working level in the Ministries and various
government services, not senior political appointments). Until now,
she said, government employment either has required NCP membership,
or recommendation of an NCP-official. Al Mahdi remarked that this
had reduced Sudan to being an "NCP state." This was not a
power-sharing agreement, she emphasized, but applied to working
level positions. She said that Umma will be back in the government
at the top anyway, if 2009 elections are free and fair,

Engaging with All Parties

¶3. (SBU) According to Dr. Al Mahdi, these discussions were
initiated by the NCP. Following the crisis within the Government of
National Unity (GNU) caused by the SPLM's withdrawal from the
Council of Ministers in December, the NCP has been advocating a
policy of "inclusiveness." It now is reaching out to the other
opposition parties outside of the GNU. Its approach to the Umma
Party is part of that broader strategy.

¶4. (SBU) Al Mahdi explained that this is the third attempt at a
formal dialogue with the NCP undertaken by the Umma Party since
¶2000. During that same period, Umma has been engaged in discussions
with the other political parties and, including with the NCP,
currently is involved in five separate party dialogues. In these
discussions, she said, Umma is pursuing broad agreement on five
issues: agreeing on basic freedoms, resolution of the Darfur
conflict, reaching a common vision for the CPA (with parties other
than the NCP and SPLM), consensus on the election law, and building
inter-party trust and confidence. However the current "agreement"
is only on the agenda.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) Dr. Al-Mahdi downplayed the importance of this framework
agreement with the NCP, trying to put it in a broader context of
other existing discussions in which Umma is participating. She also
stated that contacts were begun at the NCP Party's initiative, not
the Umma Party's initiative. She portrayed the NCP as badly shaken
by the SPLM's walk-out from the GNU in November and seeking to
deepen its ties with other parties outside the GNU. It is not
apparent that Umma's other dialogues have borne much fruit thus far.
 Whether the new discussions lead to anything significant - and more
importantly whether the Umma party is able to regain a share of the
political stage in Sudan - remains to be seen. Many observers see
the party as a spent force with its traditional constituencies
already being poached by the NCP, SPLM and Darfur rebel groups.

FERNANDEZ